

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 SSM-03 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 TRSE-00 EB-07
ACDA-07 AID-05 DHA-02 /106 W
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R 291433Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6950
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
USMISSION USUN NY
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 4723

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, IS
SUBJECT: BEGIN'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON: ASSESSMENT OF GOVERNMENT'S
PROSPECTS

BEGIN SUMMARY: AS THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE BEEN
INSTALLED FOR ONLY FOUR WEEKS WHEN BEGIN MEETS CARTER,
ANY ASSESSMENT OF ITS STRENGTH AND DURABILITY AT THIS
EARLY STAGE MUST BE PROVISIONAL IN NATURE. NONETHELESS,
WE BELIEVE THAT -- LEAVING ASIDE THE FACTOR OF BEGIN'S
HEALTH -- THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S SURVIVAL PROSPECTS AT
LEAST FOR THE NEXT EIGHT MONTHS TO A YEAR ARE GOOD. WE
BELIEVE THAT IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO BASE OUR PLANNING
ON THE HYPOTHESIS THAT THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT WILL ONLY
BE SHORT-LIVED AND A "MORE PRAGMATIC" GOVERNMENT MIGHT
BE QUICKLY FORMED TO REPLACE IT. END SUMMARY.
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1. WE RECOGNIZE, PARTICULARLY AFTER THE SURPRISE OF THE
MAY ELECTIONS, THAT PREDICTING TRENDS IN ISRAELI DOMESTIC
POLITICS IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT. IT IS PRECISELY
BECAUSE OF THE FALLIBILITY OF CRYSTAL BALL GAZING IN
THIS COUNTRY OF SURPRISES THAT WE WOULD COUNSEL AGAINST
EXCESSIVE SPECULATION REGARDING THE DURABILITY OF THE

BEGIN GOVERNMENT.

2. PUBLIC SUPPORT. LARGE SECTORS OF THE ISRAELI PUBLIC ARE PLEASED WITH THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTIONS, AND THE POPULAR MOOD IS UPBEAT. ISRAELIS WANT AND BELIEVE THAT THEY FINALLY HAVE A STRONG GOVERNMENT. IN A RECENT POLL, 54 PERCENT OF THE PARTICIPANTS EXPRESSED THEIR SUPPORT OF BEGIN AS PRIME MINISTER. THE MAY ELECTION CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED THE PUBLIC'S DISILLUIONMENT AND FATIGUE WITH THE ALIGNMENT, EVEN THOUGH THE LIKUD WAS NOT GIVEN A CLEAR MANDATE. MOST ISRAELIS, EVEN THOSE WHO HAVE THEIR RESERVATIONS AND DOUBTS ABOUT BEGIN AND THE LIKUD, SEEM PREPARED TO GIVE THE NEW GOVERNMENT A CHANCE TO PROVE ITSELF. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THIS HONEYMOON WILL END WITH THE BEGIN/CARTER MEETING.

3. COALITION STABILITY. WHILE THE COALITION IS NOT FULLY HOMOGENEOUS TO EITHER DOMESTIC OR FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES, WE BELIEVE THAT AT THIS STAGE ITS GREATER INTEREST IS TO STAY UNITED IN SUPPORT OF BEGIN. THE LIKUD UNDER BEGIN'S LEADERSHIP IS A MORE DISCIPLINED BODY THAN THE ALIGNMENT, WHILE THE RELIGIOUS PARTIES HAVE OBTAINED SIGNIFICANT CONCESSIONS IN THE RELIGIOUS FIELD WHICH SHOULD ASSURE THEIR CONTINUED PARTICIPATION. IF THE DMC JOINS THE COALITION (AND THIS IS INCREASINGLY LIKELY)(SEE CONFIDENTIAL

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SEPTTEL), THIS WILL FURTHER STRENGTHEN THE BASE OF THE GOVERNMENT. BEGIN WOULD HAVE THE BACKING OF 78 KNESSET MEMBERS, MORE THAN ANY PRIME MINISTER HAS ENJOYED SINCE THE COLLAPSE OF THE NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT IN AUGUST 1970. BUT EVEN WITHOUT THE DMC, THE PRESENT COALITION IS DURABLE IN THE TIME FRAME ADDRESSED IN THIS ANALYSIS.

4. WEAK OPPOSITION. THE ISRAELI PUBLIC, IN OUR JUDGMENT, IS NOT INTERESTED IN SEEING THE ALIGNMENT RETURN TO POWER AT AN EARLY DATE. MOST ISRAELIS SEEM TO BELIEVE THAT A CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT AFTER 29 YEARS OF LABOR MONOPOLY IS IN AND OF ITSELF A POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT. THIS IS NOT TO IGNORE THE STRONG FEELINGS IN THE LABOR CAMP, FOR BOTH IDEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL REASONS, AGAINST THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT. THE LABOR ALIGNMENT STRIKES US, HOWEVER, AS BEING IN POOR SHAPE TO MOUNT A MAJOR ATTACK AGAINST THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT IN THE MONTHS AHEAD. IT HAS BARELY BEGUN TO DEAL WITH ITS OWN INTERNAL PROBLEMS, ITS OWN COHESION IS IN DOUBT, AND IT FACES A HARD TASK AHEAD IN TRYING TO REGAIN PUBLIC CONFIDENCE AFTER WHAT HAS TRANSPIRED.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 4723

5. THE DOMESTIC SECNE. THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT, HAVING BEEN ELECTED ON THE BASIS OF ITS APPEAL FOR CHANGE, WILL NOT BE ABLE TO IGNORE THE PRESSING NEEDS FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC MEASURES. HERE SOME PITFALLS COULD ARISE SHOULD IT USE ITS PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY EARLY ON TO OPENLY CHALLENGE THE HISTADRUT ON SUCH QUESTIONS AS SUBSIDIES, LINKAGE OF SALARIES, VALUE ADDED TAX, OR IMPOSED REFORM OS HISTADRUT INSTITUTIONS. AN APPEAL BY THE ALIGNMENT-LED HISTADRUT TO THE WORKERS AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT COULD REVIVE IDEOLOGICAL ANXIETIES AND LEAD TO TESTS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S STRENGTH, WHICH, IN TURN, MIGHT STRAIN THE COALITION. HOWEVER, THE INITIAL MUTUAL APPROACH APPEARS TO BE ONE OF CAUTION, AND IT SHOULD NOT BE PRESUMED AT THIS STAGE THAT THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT WILL BE INFLEXIBLE AND INSENSITIVE ON THESE DOMESTIC ISSUES.

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6. U.S./ISRAELI RELATIONS. SOME COMMENTATORS SPECULATE THAT CONTINUING OR SHARPENING STRAINS IN U.S./ISRAELI RELATIONS AS A RESULT OF THE BEGIN/CARTER MEETING COULD SERIOUSLY AFFECT THE GOVERNMENT'S COHESION AND DURABILITY. IN OUR JUDGMENT, IT IS MORE LIKELY THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S COHESION, AT LEAST IN THE MONTHS AHEAD, WOULD BE STRENGTHENED RATHER THAN WEAKENED BY FURTHER STRAINS IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS. THERE IS A PROCLIVITY IN ISRAEL TO PULL TOGETHER IN MOMENTS WHEN THE COUNTRY FACES EXTERNAL DIFFICULTIES. IF THE PUBLIC FELT THAT THE U.S. WAS CALLING ON ISRAEL TO MAKE CONCESSIONS PERCEIVED AS DETRIMENTAL TO ITS SECURITY OR WAS PUTTING "PRESSURE" ON ISRAEL THROUGH DELAYS OR REDUCTIONS OF ECONOMIC/MILITARY AID, THIS WOULD BE LIKELY TO SOLIDIFY PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT--AT LEAST INITIALLY. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT IT WOULD TRIGGER DEFECTIONS AT AN EARLY STAGE BY THE LIBERAL OR NRP MEMBERS OF THE COALITION.

7. IN SUM, WE FIND THAT, CYNICS TO THE CONTRARY, THE PUBLIC AT THIS STAGE IS PROBABLY PREPARED TO GIVE BEGIN SOME IF NOT ALL OF THE YEAR OF GRACE WHICH HE HAS ASKED FOR. IT IS ALMOST INEVITABLE THAT THERE WILL BE STRAINS IN THE COALITION OVER DOMESTIC OR FOREIGN POLICY AS WELL AS OVER PERSONALITY RIVALRIES, BUT THESE WILL PROBABLY NOT BE ENOUGH TO PULL IT DOWN. NOR DO WE SEE THE OPPOSITION LIKELY EITHER TO CONVINCE THE PUBLIC AT AN EARLY DATE THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE REPLACED OR ABLE TO INDUCE DEFECTIONS FROM WITHIN THE PARTIES OF THE COALITION TO BRING THE GOVERNMENT DOWN. CHANGES IN ONE OR MORE OF THE FACTORS DESCRIBED ABOVE WOULD, OF COURSE, CREATE A NEW SITUATION AND OUR PRE-CONFIDENTIAL

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SENT JUDGMENT WOULD THEN HAVE TO BE REEXAMINED.
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